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The Y in Our Community

It will come as no surprise to regular readers of *Grand Traverse Insider* that the local YMCA has risen to meet community needs in this challenging economy. After all, the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA has been meeting community needs since 1964, following the venerable 150 year tradition of the YMCA in the United States.

What's unique about this year is the scope of YMCA projects. The local Y has always offered their services "to all", as their mission states, through a "No One Denied" financial assistance policy. Last year over 500 families received a total of \$122,000 in assistance so that kids could participate in soccer, football, basketball, tennis, day camp, or any of the other 65 programs and memberships the Y has to offer. In the first quarter of 2009, requests for assistance have already topped \$84,000, a 116% increase from the first quarter of 2008.

"There are a lot of people this year asking for help for their kids," said YMCA CEO Tom Van Deirse. "Besides financial data to demonstrate need, we require all applicants to submit a short narrative on why they're requesting assistance. The stories we hear over and over are 'My spouse lost their job and we don't want our kids to miss out on the great programs you offer', or 'I'm a single parent and I just need some help for my kids.'"

Besides financial assistance, this year the YMCA is also tackling the pressing community need for affordable quality day care. In February the Y Child Care Center was opened on Woodmere in the south half of the Y Gymnastics building. Services are offered for infants to school age, with a capacity to meet the needs of 84 families.

"We're going to include a day care center as part of the New Y," explained YMCA Child Care Director Molly Brown, "but the community need was too great to wait, so our board made a commitment to start up those services now." The 9,600 square foot Y Child Care Center features a large gymnasium with bounce house and fenced outdoor play area. "Kids faces really light up when they see all of the fun activities we have to offer," added Brown.

A new day care center is not the only thing new for the Y this spring. Y Youth Sports Director Mark Sinclair told us, "The Y is now hosting three varsity lacrosse teams, in addition to soccer, flag football, Pop Warner football, and all of the other outdoor sports that we offer. The need for fields is at hand." To meet this current demand, the YMCA will begin site construction at their Silver Lake Road property this spring. "We're about

half way through the fundraising for the new building,” explained Van Deinse, “so we can’t start construction yet, but we can and must get those fields ready by this fall.”

A good portion of the entrance drive and parking lot will be constructed this spring, as well.

From sports programming serving more than 10,000 kids every year, to critical services like child care, summer camp, and financial assistance, the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA has been a vital resource for the Grand Traverse Bay Area for almost 50 years. Dave Eitland, Director of Development for the Y put it this way. “Yes, we’ve been there for the community, but it’s only because the community has been there for us every year with the kind of support we need to give the community what it needs.”

With the right support, the construction of the New Y will insure those community needs are met for the next 50 years, as well.